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ABSTRACT

Charter schools are public, nonsectarian schools that operate under a written contract from a local school board or other organization. This book describes the history of the charter-school movement and the patterns that current charter-school advocates may find themselves repeating; offers examples of existing charter schools, enabling legislation, and community reaction; and presents guidance for charter-school developers and operators. The introduction describes the key elements of the charter concept and shows how it differs from other forms of nontraditional education. Chapter 1 tours a number of charter schools and shows that despite the enormous differences among them, they all share the requirement for improving student performance and for demonstrating accountability. Chapter 2 examines the history of the charter-school concept and its genesis among teachers and parents. It also reviews the political battle that produced the nation's first charter-school law in Minnesota in 1991. Chapters 3 and 4 examine specific challenges facing charter schools and their potential role as competitors that improve the performance of the entire public school system. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 offer guidance, based on data from a survey of 110 charter schools across the U.S., for people interested in starting charter schools. The eighth chapter describes lessons learned from the charter-school movement to date, and the ninth chapter looks ahead to the future of charter schools. Appendices contain a list of current charter-school legislation and state-specific contracts in the 25 states with charter-school laws; a list of people, organizations, and on-line resources; and a model for charter-school legislation. An index and chapter endnotes are included. (LMI)

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